



**STATEMENT OF PROCEEDINGS
FOR THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, ROOM 739
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012
<http://lachildrenscommission.org>**

Monday, May 2, 2016

10:00 AM

AUDIO LINK FOR THE ENTIRE MEETING. (16-2321)

Attachments: [AUDIO](#)

Present: Commissioner Geneva Berger, Commissioner Carol O. Biondi,
Commissioner Maria Brenes, Commissioner Candace Cooper,
Commissioner Patricia Curry, Commissioner Wendy Garen,
Commissioner John Kim, Commissioner Liz Seipel,
Commissioner Janet Teague, Vice Chair Jacquelyn McCroskey,
Vice Chair Wendy B. Smith and Chair Sunny Kang

Absent: Commissioner Sydney Kamlager

I. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

1. Call to Order. (16-1842)

The meeting was called to order by Chair Kang at 10:05 a.m.

2. Introduction of meeting attendees. (16-1843)

Self-introductions were made.

3. Approval of the minutes from the April 18, 2016 meeting. (16-1844)

**On motion of Vice Chair Smith, seconded by Commissioner Teague
(Commissioners Cooper and Kamlager being absent), this item was
approved.**

Attachments: [SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

II. REPORTS

4. Chair's Report. (16-1846)

Chair Kang reported the following:

- **On May 4, 2016, at 10:00 a.m., the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Probation Department will convene a meeting to discuss implementation of a Homelessness Initiative recommendation geared towards discharged Foster Care and Juvenile Probation youth. The meeting will be held at the Metroplex office. Those interested in attending can obtain further details from Tamara N. Hunter, MSW, Executive Director;**
- **Welcomed newly appointed Brandon Nichols, Chief Deputy Director of DCFS;**
- **Public Comment Forms are available for attendees who would like to address the Commission; there are also DCFS Public Inquiry Forms available if there are questions regarding specific cases that will be forwarded to DCFS for a response.**

5. Report by Philip L. Browning, Director, Department of Children and Family Services. (16-1845)

Philip L. Browning, Director, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) reported the following:

- **There is an impressive number of grandparents fostering their grandchildren; finding placements for foster children is very challenging. Currently there are over 35,000 children in foster care and approximately 20,000 are in out of home placements;**
- **Met with newly hired staff last week and discussed the number of children in foster care, the amount of money needed to provide services, and critical safety issues; they were impressed, and understood how critical their roles are in keeping children safe and providing services;**
- **Approximately 200 new employees are expected in the next few months; caseloads are expected to decrease. Budget Hearings include requests for additional staff;**
- **Changes in the DCFS culture are anticipated towards the core practice model;**

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- **DCFS, Department of Mental Health, Probation, and other entities met to discuss how to roll out a new way of doing business, the Core Practice Model; materials will be disseminated to staff to promote and encourage the new changes to business practices. There were informative video presentations, attractive art work, and glowing success stories;**
 - **The Approved Relative Caregiver (ARC) Funding Option Program, approved by the State and effective January 1, 2015, continues to provide monetary assistance to those foster parents caring for relative foster children; currently, there are approximately 2,000 cases in Los Angeles County.**

In response to questions posed regarding the ARC program, Mr. Browning reported that approximately 9,500 foster children are placed in out-of-home care with relatives. He went on to explain that ARC increases payments to children placed in foster care with relative caregivers when children are not eligible for federal foster care benefits.

III. PRESENTATIONS

6. Resource Family Approval Program, ASFA & Kinship Services and Support for Relative Caregivers

- **Nina Powell, Division Chief, Department of Children & Family Services, ASFA/Kinship and Parents in Partnership Division (16-1848)**

Nina Powell, Division Chief, ASFA, Kinship Support and Parents in Partnership, DCFS, reported that they are fortunate to have innovators on the Board, in the Department, and kinship community recognizing the need to increase the Department's ability to support relative caregivers. Ms. Powell presented the following:

- **Approximately 50% of children are placed in homes of relatives or non-related extended family members;**
- **The County created two (2) kinship centers located in the City of Los Angeles and West Covina, operating for nearly 20 years;**
 - o **Monthly kinship advisory meetings are held, with West Covina having a meeting last month. Community partners and the kinship community that attended stated they were happy to have meetings in their community and appreciated having a better understanding.**

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- **The State granted the County an opportunity for the Department to engage in the Relative Support Services Demonstration Project;**
 - **The project partners DCFS with community based organizations to have services available in a localized way;**
 - **DCFS' goal is to have one (1) community based organization available to serve the community in each Service Planning Area (SPA) to allow caregivers a broadened network of support.**
 - **The State provided the County an opportunity to apply for the Foster, Retention and Support Plan;**
 - **To assist with Resource Family Approval (RFA) planning for statewide implementation prior to 2017; and**
 - **DCFS submitted a comprehensive plan that exceeded the overall state budget; the Department wanted to communicate to their partners at the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) what is needed to effectively implement RFA and to meet the needs of the relative community as a whole.**
 - **Children under DCFS supervision**
 - **On April 1, 2016, DCFS implemented the emergency placement stipend of \$400 to provide support to families during the approval process. Upon approval relatives receive foster care payments or approved relative caregiver (ARC) funds if they are not eligible for federal foster care payments. The \$400 stipend is a one-time payment, per child, per placement and is received by families within 10 business days. DCFS' goal is to distribute the stipends as soon as possible and an automated process was setup. This does not create additional workload for caseworkers. The Department has the technology and revenue enhancement team engaged to ensure funds are issued to caregivers as soon as placement is entered into the system.**
 - **Tangible Support**
 - **Essential items such as cribs and diapers are made available to caregivers, if needed, at the time of emergency placement. Items are on ordered and kept at the kinship centers.**

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- o DCFS recognizes that there are not enough placement resources. They support children remaining in their family system; people that are familiar to them and people that the children know have greater placement stability and support of reunification. If that is not feasible, there are other permanency options. DCFS' goal is to help families navigate through the system during the approval process and to get approved as efficiently as possible.
 - RFA
 - o As the County moves forward in planning, there will be more support available for families and additional standards that all caregivers will need to meet;
 - o Written directives stated that all 58 counties must approve families within 90 days;
 - o DCFS is establishing an infrastructure that will support families and their communities by providing as much assistance as possible during their approval process so that they will have some information and the support they need; a great opportunity is presented through the Relative Support Services Demonstration Project.
 - o The deadline for Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to submit their Request for Information (RFI) proposal is May 9, 2016;
 - o DCFS' goal is to have various models that will demonstrate how the Department can support and enhance their delivery system within the County;
 - o DCFS will continue to approve relatives daily and go through the process for those walking through the doors;
 - o While preparing for RFA, there may be some discomfort, however, it is anticipated that it will be much better than it's been in terms of the Department's ability to provide more support to communities.

In response to questions posed by the Commission, Ms. Powell responded with the following:

- Counties who implemented early had challenges in completing the RFA process within 90 days. The Adoption Safe Family Act (ASFA)

approval process does not have as many mandates as the RFA, such as training and psychosocial assessment (family study). AFSA strives for approval within 30 days. At the 30 day mark, approximately 80% of families are approved. Factors such as live scans or residence modification can cause delays in the approval process. Ms. Powell stated that the early implementing counties shared lessons learned that will help the County avoid making the same mistakes and plan around and strive for the 90 day deadline;

- One shared lesson learned was that some relatives that received approval had children return to their birth family and the relatives decided to become regular resource parents, taking in general foster children, as a result of having a positive experience with the County. The Department hopes that this will increase the County's placement resources. In terms of the 90 days, relative caregivers were concerned about having childcare while attending training classes and it was stated that it made a difference for families.
- San Francisco County helped Los Angeles County think through the management of family beyond approval and also to think through contracts with community partners. Having partners conduct various aspects of the work helps move the process along and creates the infrastructure beyond the approval process because it is the long term support that makes a difference in families.

Philip L. Browning, Director, DCFS, added that with the new psychosocial studies, a lot of relatives may back out; however, one lesson learned was that there were not a lot of fall-out rates. Mr. Browning stated that there is a two (2) year grandfathered-in plan for those relatives already approved; therefore, not everyone will have to be certified on January 1, 2017.

Ms. Powell added that the County will implement emergency placements and new placements with the grandfathered-in plan in October 2016. DCFS will be able to submit that to CDSS in September 2016. It will include how the transition process is looking at people already approved and bringing them up to RFA standard. There are annual updates required as part of the RFA process. It will be a gradual process and the date is based on their annual review.

In response to questions posed by Tamara Hunter, Executive Director,

Ms. Powell confirmed that funding will begin at the point of approval. Mr. Browning added that the goal is to get relatives approved as soon as possible and that 90 days is State standard.

In response to questions posed by the Commission, Ms. Powell confirmed that when other counties were unable to meet the 90 day deadline, they were able to identify other supports such as;

- Emergency childcare;**
- An infrastructure in place to help relatives who work or who need extra help;**
- Other tangible supports;**
- A mechanism that sets families into the DPSS system; however, this is significantly less than funds received in the foster care system. It is an option families in LA County will always have.**

Ms. Powell added that if DCFS can use a holistic approach to help families during the crisis then they will not have to go through a whole new avenue to get funding. It gets confusing for people when funds are in different areas and makes it simpler to streamline everything.

Attachments: [SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

7. Advocacy for Relative Caregivers

- Joseph Devall, Deputy Director of Policy, Community Coalition**
- Sylvie de Toledo, Founder & Clinical Director, Grandparents As Parents (GAP)**
- Cheral Hymen, Founder & Director, Raising Our Children's Kids (ROCK)**
(16-1849)

Sylvie De Toledo, Founder & Clinical Director of Grandparents As Parents (GAP), presented the following:

- GAP was founded in 1987 and provides weekly services and support to relative caregivers and non-related extended caregivers in the areas of Los Angeles County and Orange County;**
- It is a one-stop-shop that provides all families with free support, advocacy, resources, referrals, and counseling in times of crisis, as well**

as access to the Caregiver Resource Center located at the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court. Caregivers who are unable to attend in person can receive the same services and support via telephone; this includes social events to allow the children and caregivers the opportunity to interact, share experiences and create a bond. Clothing and furniture are collected and kept in a storage unit until needed;

- GAP hosts an annual Professional Development Conference for relative caregivers and it is open to other agencies interested in attending;
- The agency offers an internship program to local college and university students majoring in Social Work that allows practical experience to be gained; previous interns have found employment opportunities with the DCFS, GAP, and other agencies;
- Throughout the 30 years of working with relative caregivers the most challenging Kinship issues were identified in the following areas (see supporting document for details):
 - o The need to place children in the most expeditious manner;
 - o Previous infractions with the courts or open cases with DCFS dating back to 20-30 years;
 - o Housing, no up-front money available to facilitate placement;
 - o The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) process is extensive; and
 - o The continuous change of Social Workers.

Cheral Hymen, Founder and Director of Raising Our Children's Kids (ROCK), presented the following:

- ROCK is a child centered and family focused agency that has been serving kinship families, including parents in the Antelope Valley for approximately 20 years;
- Provides all families with free support, advocacy, resources, referrals, and peer counseling in times of crisis. ROCK also provides parent visitation, Black Effective parenting classes and access to the Kinship

Resource Center, which is located in a home type setting in the City of Lancaster. ROCK also developed a Parent Reunification Model notebook;

- Hosts social events to allow children and caregivers the opportunity to interact, share experiences and create a bond; Clothing and furniture are collected and loaned out when needed;
- Assists families in filing for probate legal guardianship, state appeals and representation during state appeals, court forms, expungements, fee waivers, restraining orders, and notary services will be available soon;
- Works in collaboration with Parents In Partnership and DCFS to ensure that children are placed in good homes;
- In working with relative caregivers the most challenging issues are:
 - o When children are not placed in relative care homes, they are most likely to be placed in different foster homes and in adoptive homes, adding more difficulties to the relative care placement process;
 - o Due to the current litigation against DCFS staff, social workers are only allowed to do what is court ordered, this affects the work and moral of the social workers;
 - o Inconsistent work methods among DCFS social workers adds difficulties to the process. For example, a social worker advised her that she cannot be an advocate and monitor for the same individual; however, other social workers are allowing her to utilize dual roles;
 - o The disqualification process is vague, at times, denial letters are not issued explaining the reasons or appeal process, this leaves the caregiver without further information; and
 - o Approved relative caregivers do not have access to Child and Family Team (CFTs) meetings. In many situations this is used as a form of power by the parent by not allowing the relative caregiver access to the child's information.

Ms. Hymen was asked if non-contracted Community Based Organizations (CBO's) are allowed to provide services and resources at

DCFS offices, Ms. Hymen responded to the following:

- **Several DCFS social workers are reporting that they cannot act on anything unless it is court ordered;**
- **Kin are not allowed to visit children during the approval process, this is based on various reasons such as time constraints, the foster parent may have distance between kin and foster home, not enough monitors, etc.; and**
- **There are no policies that prohibit kin from visiting children; however, procedures such as case reviews and clearances need to be done prior to the visit.**

Commissioner Curry asked that the Commission follow up on the issues regarding kin visits.

Chair Kang added that the Placement Committee within the Commission for Children and Families will look into the issues addressed regarding kinship.

The Commission thanked Ms. De Toledo and Ms. Hymen for their work and support of families.

Joseph Devall, Deputy Director of Policy, Community Coalition, presented an overview of the Families Helping Families: South L.A. Kinship Navigator Program:

- **The program was federally funded, worked in collaboration with several community organizations and Los Angeles County Departments and commenced as a method to provide kinship families in the South Los Angeles region with support, services and resources, the program concluded in 2015;**
- **To raise awareness about the program, effective communication strategies such as the posting of informational billboards, handing out flyers and a Public Service Announcement featuring Baron Davis, NBA All-star, who was raised by his grandparents in South LA, were utilized. As a result, over 10,000 families mostly in the South Los Angeles region were provided with resources;**
- **Experienced caregivers served as kinship navigators to ensure that**

families were connected and utilized the resources that best met their needs, making the families' experience more welcoming; Caregivers were also trained as Peer Support Group Facilitators and held weekly support groups, a stipend was provided;

- In the process of creating the program a network of organizations including partners and non-partners was created, adding resources such as educational and wellness programs;
- Sample findings of the program identified that significant improvements were made in the following areas: Access, Protective Factors, Wellbeing, and Functioning;
- The program was created as a demonstration of what can be done to assist relative caregivers. It was not expected to be permanent, but lessons learned were utilized to improve other programs. A key finding regarding the length of time a caregiver provided support to the children was that the longer the caregiver provided support, the more their health deteriorated, additional support and resources need to be provided; and
- During the course of the program the most challenging issues identified were:
 - o Families who are not connected to DCFS do not have access to the same services and resources and are more likely to experience poverty;
 - o New housing requirements are not feasible due to funding and outdated systems;
 - o Data tracking for families entering the probate guardianship system; and
 - o A small amount of families were utilizing Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds, without TANF funds, families are unable access to medical, oral and vision health services.

Commissioner Biondi added that in 1999 relative caregivers had no resources or support services and thanks to the Commission that has

changed.

Mr. Devall confirmed that different roles and expectations vary from one social worker to the next.

The Commission thanks Mr. Devall for his presentation.

Attachments: [SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

IV. MISCELLANEOUS

8. Matters not posted on the agenda, to be discussed and (if requested) placed on the agenda for action at a future meeting of the Commission, or matters requiring immediate action because of an emergency situation or where the need to take action arose subsequent to the posting of the agenda. (16-1851)

There were no matters presented.

9. Opportunity for members of the public to address the Commission on item(s) of interest that are within the jurisdiction of the Commission. (16-1852)

The following Members of the Public addressed the Commission:

- **Pamela Meeker Stolz expressed concern with relative caregivers not receiving the funds they need, relatives are referred to DPSS and when the parent is receiving public assistance, relatives are denied funds. In addition, they are still expected to drive the children to appointments and visits as needed. She further added that relatives are not foster parents, families are in turmoil and assistance is needed on an emergency basis;**
- **Holly Miner shared that she is a maternal grandmother with an open case for five long years, she asked for support with being discriminated against by a social worker. Ms. Miner indicated that her grandchildren have spent two years in the foster care system and she has not been given a reason why they have not granted her custody. In one instance, she was told by the social worker to be her eyes and ears and when she reported an incident, she immediately received a threatening call from her granddaughter's father threatening her life. Chair Kang referred Ms. Miner to DCFS staff in attendance;**
- **Imrith Martinez expressed his gratitude to Ms. Sylvie of GAP who is the only person who has advocated for him. Mr. Martinez is in need of funds to be able to meet the housing requirements to gain custody of his siblings. There are no resources available to support relatives before**

children are placed to support the actual placement occurring. He urges the Commission and anyone who is able, to influence policy changes to allow funding for those that are trying to keep families together. Mr. Martinez currently has two jobs and would be able to support his siblings, ages 16, 13 and 10 if they were placed with him; however, there are no programs available to help him with the move in fees required for him to move into a larger apartment so his siblings can be placed;

- Betty P. Halle of Advocates 4 Family Caregivers indicated that while she is out of the DCFS system, she continues to serve as an advocate for families to a system that is broken. She works with many social workers and encouraged DCFS to fix in house problems. She added that RA's should be accountable because one Director cannot address all issues in LA County.

10. Adjournment. (16-1853)

The meeting adjourned at 12:03 p.m.